

## Nuclear advocates prepare strategy for expansion

**By Bill Loveless, *Inside Energy***  
**July 19, 2004**



Electronic newsletter from Communications  
for employees of the INEEL

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Washington, D.C. – More than 30 representatives of the U.S. nuclear energy industry, academia and Energy Department national laboratories met outside Washington last week to prepare a strategy for expanding the nation's reliance on nuclear power through the middle of the century.

“We want to try to unify this diverse industry, academia and the national labs to move nuclear energy forward,” Ralph Bennett, director of Advanced Nuclear Energy at Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory, told the forum in Arlington, Va., July 13. INEEL organized the event.

Bennett said the group plans to issue by September a report that the White House and Congress can consider in preparing national energy policies.



Chris Morgan photo

**Kyle McSarrow, DOE Deputy Energy Secretary, kicked off the Decision-Makers Forum in Washington, D.C., July 13. Paul Kearns, right, INEEL Lab director, shared the stage at the forum.**

Deputy Energy Secretary Kyle McSlarrow and other speakers told the group that increased use of nuclear power offers the United States the best opportunity to strengthen its energy security and improve its environment. As a power source, nuclear energy compares favorably to natural gas, supplies of which are uncertain, McSlarrow said.

Noting nuclear power now accounts for 20 percent of U.S. generating capacity, he said, “It’s a scary future, believe me, if that (share) drops.”

Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Pete Domenici, R-N.M., called the task timely. “While there is a growing consensus that expanded use of nuclear energy offers great benefits for our society, a unified strategy that addresses the question of how to achieve these benefits must be developed,” Domenici, an ardent supporter of nuclear energy, said in a statement July 13.

Participants in the daylong meeting acknowledged, however, that persuading the public that the United States should expand its dependence on nuclear energy remains a major challenge for the industry.

William Gauntt, director of business development for Washington Group International Inc., said the nuclear industry has always had difficulty winning over voters, whose support he indicated is essential because “they are the ones who elect the senators and congressmen who implement policy.”

**Decision-Makers Forum participants, right, attend one of two work sessions during the daylong event.**



**James Lake, left, INEEL associate Lab director for nuclear energy, addresses colleagues during a work session.**

John Longenecker, president and general manager of Longenecker & Associates Inc., said a list of objectives drawn up by the event’s participants – such as demonstrating a stable licensing process for new reactors, promoting advanced reactor designs and securing federal funding

for nuclear energy r&d – was not as significant as would be the actions taken by the group to pursue those goals.

“This list doesn’t surprise any of us,” said Longenecker, a former official in the Energy Department’s nuclear program. “We all knew (the objectives) are there. It’s what we do when we get out of here.”

Organizers of the “Decision-Makers’ Forum on a Unified Strategy for Nuclear Energy,” primarily from DOE national labs, maintained later that the event could lead to an effective strategy. Bennett, for example, said the meeting enabled representatives of the nuclear industry, universities with nuclear energy programs and the national labs to concentrate specifically on preparing a long-term strategy for the sector, something he maintained they have rarely had an opportunity to do.

“There hasn’t been productive work on a consensus like we have been able to do today,” he said.

INEEL Laboratory Director Paul Kearns agreed with that view. “We don’t often meet as a group like this,” he said. “When we do, it’s not often in a strategic context like this.”

Kearns, McSlarrow and three other speakers set the stage for the meeting by observing risks to U.S. energy security, including volatility in the Middle East, which holds most of the world’s oil reserves, and China’s rapidly increasing demand for oil. They maintained that those concerns as well as ongoing interest in air pollution and climate change keep alive the notion that nuclear power can grow in the United States, as it has in other parts of the world.

Sandia National Laboratories President C. Paul Robinson said the costs to the United States of increasing reliance on oil and natural gas are “not sustainable.” Those costs, he noted, include much of the U.S. trade deficit with other countries, the military expenses associated with keeping oil lanes from the Middle East open, and the shift abroad of energy-intensive industries.



**James Reinsch, Bechtel Nuclear Power president**

Bechtel Nuclear Power President James Reinsch said DOE funding for nuclear energy r&d still lags that spent on other department programs, despite the Bush administration’s avowed commitment to the sector. DOE sought \$96 million for nuclear energy r&d in FY-05, 26 percent less than those programs received in FY-04. The \$96 million is part of an overall request of \$835.3 million for energy supply programs in FY-05. “We can stop being apologetic about asking for our fair share,” Reinsch said.

Michael Corradini, chairman of the Nuclear Engineering Department at the University of Wisconsin and former member of the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board, said he found encouraging an increase in U.S. student enrollment in bachelor of science programs in nuclear engineering since 2000. Those enrollments rose from about 600 in 2000 to about 1,400 recently, he said.

While Corradini said he could not explain the increase, he added it may signal a changing perception of nuclear energy among young adults. "When see a change in visibility in a field, they react to it," he said.

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